

RIVERS ALLIANCE OF CONNECTICUT
7 West Street/ POB 1797/ Litchfield CT 06759
rivers@riversalliance.org 860-3619349

TO: Sen. Ed Meyer and Rep. Linda Gentile, Chairmen, and Members of the Environment Committee

RE: Public Hearing on Senate Bill 70, AAC The Preservation of Lands Under the Control of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture

DATE: February 19, 2014

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship.

We and the undersigned write in strong support of Senate Bill 70. Rivers Alliance is one of several groups (including Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, and Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter) that have been seeking effective protections for lands purchased by, or donated to, the state as open space for the enjoyment of the public and the preservation of natural resources. In the past 15 years, these public lands frequently have been the object of proposals to transfer title or and/or change use for purposes not compatible with conservation values. Occasionally, these efforts have been successful. More often, they have been turned aside, but at the expense of time and effort by public agencies, already stretched thin, and/or by members of the public, who understandably chafe at the need to fight for what is arguably already theirs.

Recent research has shown that most state-owned lands, especially those in the Recreational and Natural Heritage Trust Program, have no legal protection, nothing in the land records, to prevent conveyance to another owner or for another use, including private development. Two years ago, Public Act 12-152 AAC The State's Open Space Plan called on DEEP to develop a strategy for preserving lands of high conservation value in perpetuity. Since then, numerous legal and logistic concerns have impeded progress. **Senate Bill 70 makes explicit that the state has the right and the responsibility to protect, for the public, lands acquired and held for their high conservation value**, including state forests and parks, wildlife management areas, and endangered habitats. Many of these properties contain or abut precious, high-quality waters.

We thank you for raising this bill, and urge you to pass it. We would be pleased to assist in any way.

Margaret Miner, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, Exec. Dir., & State Lands Working Group
Amy Paterson, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, Exec. Dir., & State Lands Working Group
Eric Hammerling, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Exec. Dir. & State Lands Working Group
Martin Mador, Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter, & State Lands Working Group
Kristen Begor, Norwalk River Watershed Assoc., Pres: & Wilton Conservation Commissioner, Member
Jill and Alton Blodgett, Lebanon Conservation and Agriculture Commission, Member
Russell Brenneman, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters, Director

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES

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Patricia Bresnahan, Willimantic River Watershed Alliance, Director
Gail Collins Cheshire Land Trust, Member
Marianne Corona, Middlefield Representative, Board of CACIWC
Chris Craig, Goshen Land Trust, Vice President
Jean Darlington & Eduardo Marchena, New Hartford
Deborah Moshier-Dunn & Michael Dunn, Save the River, Save the Hills
Russ and Krista Dirienzo, Roxbury
Eileen Fielding, Farmington River Watershed Association, Executive Director
Bruce Fletcher, Connecticut Federation of Lakes
Judi Friedman, People's Action for Clean Energy, President; Canton
Sigrun N. Gadwa, Carya Ecological Services, LLC, Cheshire
Sarah Gager, Washington CT
Herb Gram, Heritage, Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board, Member
Robert Gregorski, Naugatuck River Watershed, Association
Diana Hiza, Canton
Bill Horne, Branford
Karen Huber, Southbury Land Trust, Executive Director
Dot Kelly, Darien
John R. Logan, New Haven Land Trust
Emily MacGibeny, Connecticut College, student
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Elaine McKinney, Oxford
Jane-Kerin Moffat, Greenwich, CT
David Patee, Redding Conservation Commission, Chairman
Mark Picton, Mark Picton Environmental Management, Washington Depot
Catherine Rawson, Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust, Executive Director
Bruce J. Rich, Connecticut Fly Fisherman's Association, President
David Roberts, Friends of Mianus River Park, President; Stamford
Lori Romick, Wepawaug River Watershed Alliance & Housatonic River Estuary Commission
Jean de Smet, Naubesatuck Watershed Council , President
James F. Smith, Preston
Joan Smith, Groton Open Space Association, President
Jack Stoecker, Mianus River Watershed Council
Town of South Windsor Conservation Commission & South Windsor Open Space Task Force: Jeff
Folger, Louise Evans, Pat Botteron, Elizabeth Warren, Barbara Kelly, Carol Heffler, and Susan Larsen
Louise Washer, Norwalk River Watershed Association, Director
Donald Watson, Trumbull Conservation Commission, Member
Lynn Werner, Housatonic Valley Association, Executive Director
Evan J. Williams
Kevin Zak and Sondra Harmon, Naugatuck River Revival Group, Directors